what
?
to
do
when
your
comrades
are
bleeding

Preparation is key. Stock your street medic kit or daily bag with blood-absorbing supplies, just in case. The first order of business will be managing blood flow, and 100% cotton bleeding products are effective and available at most drugstores. You never know when your comrades may bleed.

The average adult contains approximately 4 quarts (3.79 litres) of blood, and can lose up to 14% of their blood before nausea and dizziness set in.

When you realize your comrade is bleeding, ask what they need before jumping in with assistance or advice. Start by asking where the pain is. If they've bled before, ask how they've managed their symptoms before. Common symptoms of blood loss include cramping, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, hunger, and migraines.

Some of your comrades will bleed multiple times in their lives. Some may bleed periodically. How prepared are you to support your bleeding comrades?

We're talking about menstruation here. You know people that bleed. Roughly 1 in 2 people will menstruate in their lifetime. 1 in 3 people are currently in the midst of a menstrual cycle, and around 1 in 12 people are actively bleeding right now.

What are you doing to care for your bleeding comrades? Picking up tampons for your girlfriend is no longer the bare minimum-what are you doing to support your bleeding friends that don't have sex with you?

Blood Facts

The average menstruator may bleed 450-550 times in their life. An average bleed consists of roughly 60-80

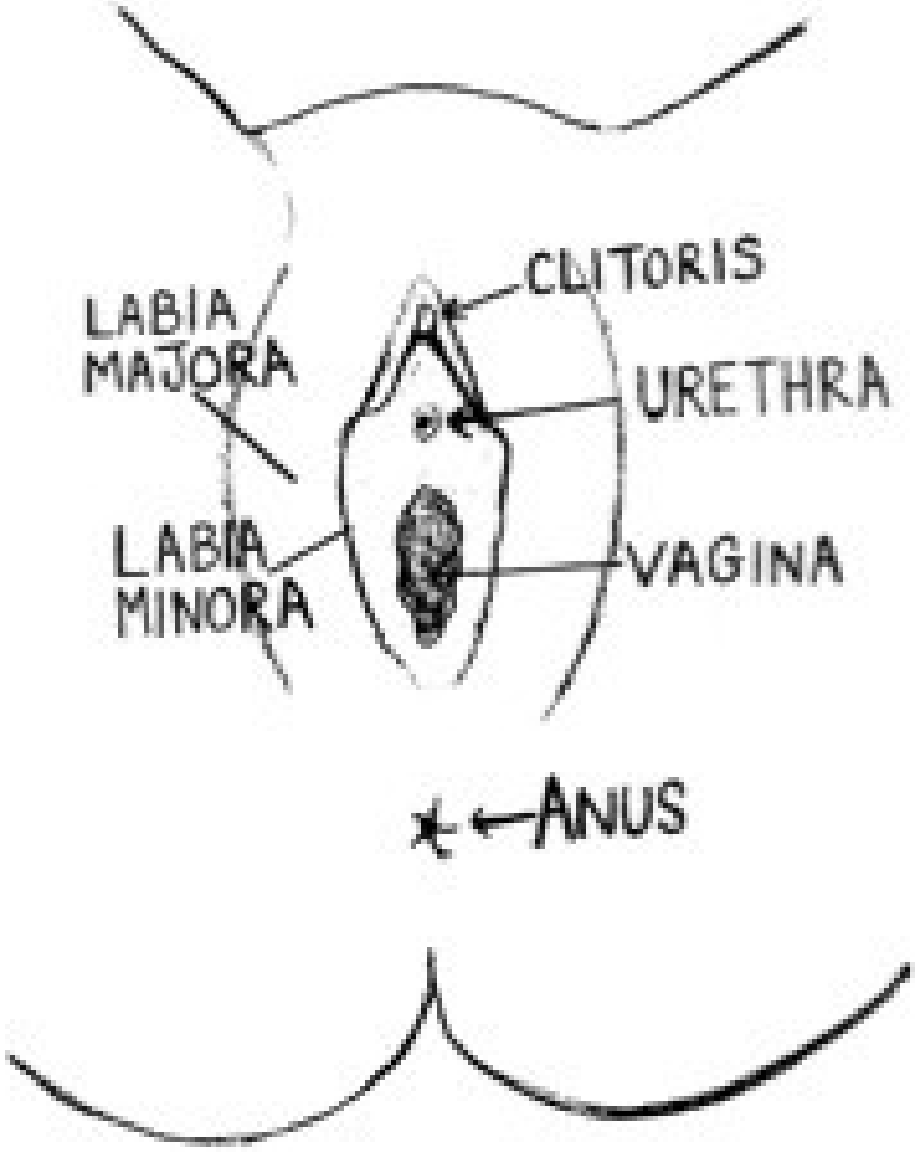
mLs of blood, and ~80-100 mLs of other fluids. These fluids can contain endometrial cells and immune cells.

This equals ~33-44L of blood, or ~77-88L of total fluid loss over a lifetime of bleeds. The average menstruator will bleed for roughly 2300-2800 days, or 6.25-7.75 years, of their life.

Positioning

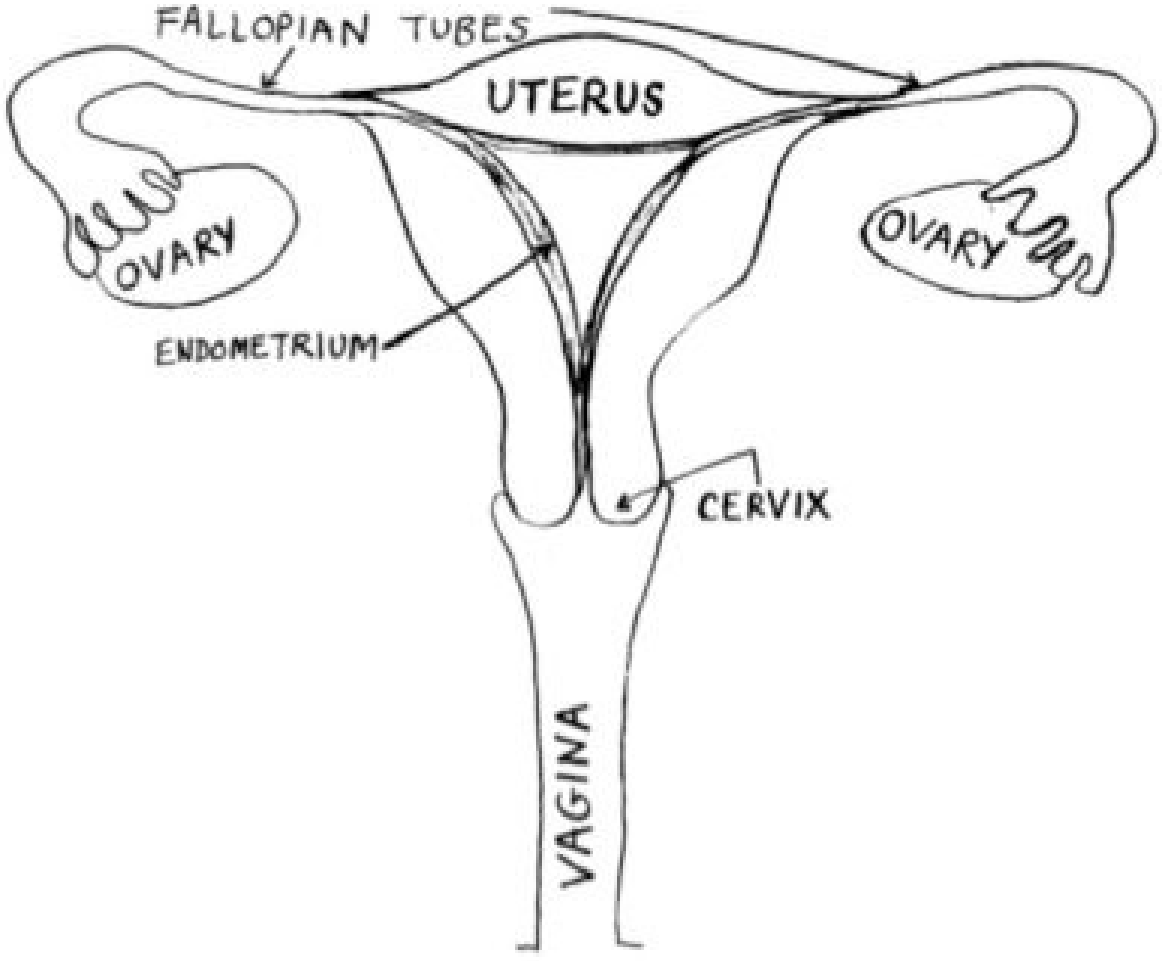
There are several parts to the reproductive system. Inside the body are the ovaries, which house the eggs; the fallopian tubes, through which eggs move to the uterus; the egg hangs out here for the second half of the cycle; the cervix is the tiny opening at the bottom of the uterus; and the vagina, also called the vaginal opening, which is where the blood leaves the body. Outside the body is the clitoris, a very sensitive organ whose sole function is pleasure; the urethra, a small opening for urination; labia majora, or outer folds; labia minora, or inner folds; and the vagina.

What



actually *is* Menstruation?

Most Western medical professionals consider the first day of bleeding to be the beginning of the menstrual cycle. The cycle has two main phases: the follicular phase, and the proliferative phase, separated by ovulation. On the first day of the cycle, the ovaries begin ripening eggs. The follicles (sacs filled with fluid) each support an egg. At the start of the cycle, the production of follicle stimulating hormones increases, and between 3 and 30 follicles begin to grow. Simultaneously, on the first day of the cycle,



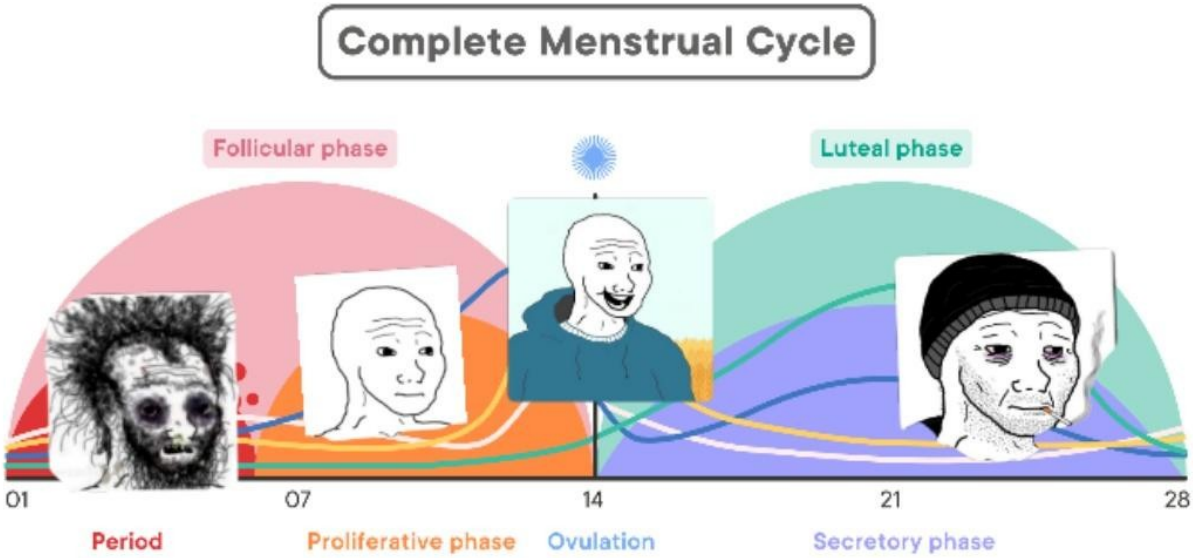
blood begins to exit the body through the vaginal

canal. This blood is typically darker in colour than what you'd see from a papercut or other wound. Menstrual blood also flushes other tissues from the uterus, which affects the colour and consistency. The fluids leaving the body were lining the walls of the uterus for the past few weeks. Bleeding tends to be heavier the first few days of the period, often tapering off towards the end. The bleeding portion of the cycle lasts between 4-9 days, and the total follicular phase lasts around 14-18 days.

After menstruation ends, the proliferative phase begins, marked by rapid estrogen and progesterone hormone production. The uterine creates a new lining. Near the end of this phase, one follicle continues to grow, and produce the hormone estrogen, and the other follicles break down. The body also begins to produce the lutenizing hormone to prepare for ovulation.

Halfway through the cycle, one of the ovaries releases an ova (egg). This egg travels from the ovaries through the Fallopian tubes to the uterus. Some people can feel a small spasm at ovulation; others never notice anything. After ovulation, the luteal phase begins. The lutenizing hormone is responsible for egg growth before implantation, and levels are highest at this stage. The uterine lining continues to thicken for a few days.

Around this point, estrogen production starts to drop, and for many, premenstrual syndrome (PMS) sets in. The vast majority of menstruators experience PMS.



10-16 days after ovulation, the uterine lining begins to shed, and another period begins.

For some, menstruation is merely an inconvenience; for others, it's painful and debilitating.

Symptoms and Care

Nutrition

Bleeding takes a lot of energy; therefore, nutrition during bleeds is critical. Ask your bleeding comrade what they typically eat during bleeds. Generally, iron-rich foods like dark leafy greens and dark meats are recommended. Dark chocolate is also great, as it contains copper, magnesium, and calcium, which can relieve cramping and produce endorphins. Hydration is also key—blood loss is fluid loss. Teas like raspberry or blackberry leaf are both good for hydration and cramp management.

Fatigue

Fatigue is also common during bleeds. This symptom can arise from multiple factors; some bleeders report difficulty sleeping during bleeds, especially while experiencing cramps. Others find it harder to cook and nourish themselves while bleeding. Your comrades may need to rest during this time. To gift rest, take on a task for your comrade. This task could be housework, like doing the dishes or laundry, or it could be scheduling an appointment for them. Ask your comrade what they find energy-draining.

Cramps

Cramping is also a common symptom. Around 60% of bleeders report mild to moderate cramps, and up to 15% report severe (impacting daily function) cramping. The rate of severe cramping is believed to be under reported, mainly due to the fact that menstrual health is under-researched and historically has not been taken seriously by most medical professionals. Many menstruators take ibuprofen (like Tylenol or Midol) for the pain. Applying heat via hot water bottle or heating pad is also effective for cramp relief. Massaging the lower back, lower abdomen, and thighs can also be helpful. Light exercise, like a walk or swim, can also relieve pain, though fatigue can make it difficult to leave the house. Offer to go for a walk or to the gym with your bleeding comrade.

Premenstrual Symptoms

90% of menstruators experience symptoms before their period begins. These can include mood swings, breast/chest tenderness, bloating, cramps, fatigue, acne, irritability, hypersensitivity, and depression

during the week before a bleed begins. Your comrades may also benefit from care the week before a bleed.

Emotional/Psychological effects

As mentioned above, many experience emotional changes with their cycle. Several studies have found clinical levels of depression and anxiety during the premenstrual phase in otherwise mentally healthy individuals. There is also evidence for increased risk of suicidality during this time.

Consider the sheer inescapability of menstruation. The only ways to stop bleeding for several days every month for roughly half your lifespan is to take hormonal contraceptives, testosterone HRT, undergo a hysterectomy, or get pregnant (which is only a temporary solution).

Dysphoria

Menstruators may experience gender dysphoria during bleeds. This discomfort can come from several places; the labour of taking care of body parts they may not wish to have, gendered perceptions of menstruation, the need to use bathrooms with trashcans (which are often labelled ‘Women’s’). There may not be much for you to do to support bleeders experiencing dysphoria, but it is important for you to know what your comrades may be feeling.

Costs

Calculating the monetary cost of menstruation is difficult because of the number of variables-length of the period (which not only varies per person but also

varies over a lifetime), types of menstrual products used, costs of those products changing over time. In addition, prices change depending on location (rural prices can be double urban prices) and whether or not products are taxed. Further, many people can't afford to buy in bulk, which is cheaper in the long run, if they are living paycheque to paycheque.

Other factors besides the cost of menstrual bleeding products can include over-the-counter pain relievers (like Tylenol or Midol), prescription painkillers for severe cramps, acne medication, hot water bottles and heating pads, missed time from work, birth control, doctor's visits, new underwear, iron supplements, and more.

Monthly, disposable bleeding products can cost ~$12-$20, plus probably ibuprofen. Estimates range from $2500-$10, 000 lifetime menstrual costs.

Endometriosis

Roughly 10% of bleeders will develop endometriosis; the condition of endometrial tissue growing in places that aren't inside the uterus. Most commonly, this results in tissue growth on and around the ovaries and Fallopian tubes, and outside the uterus. Many folks with endometriosis experience severe cramping, consistently heavy periods, and near-constant pelvic pain. In the United States, one can expect to see at least 6 physicians before receiving a diagnosis. The treatments for endometriosis include painkillers, hormones to suppress menstruation, surgery to remove cysts, and hysterectomy (removal of uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes).

Perimenopause

Menopause is actually a milestone, not a phase. The twelve-month mark from a menstruator's final period is official menopause; for the rest of their life, they are *postmenopause*. The hormone shift from menstruation towards menopause is called perimenopause. This shift is a decrease in estrogen production. It's during the perimenopause phase where symptoms like hot flashes are most likely to occur. Though not guaranteed, symptoms are likely to diminish in severity or cease completely at menopause.

What You Can Do For Your Bleeding Comrades

- Carry bleed supplies
- Keep bleed supplies in your bathroom or car
- Carry ibuprofen, Midol, or painkillers
- Make your comrade a cup of tea
- Cook them a meal
- Bring them groceries
- Take your comrade for a walk
- Bring them a hot water bottle
- Wash their dishes
- Do your comrade laundry
- Run them an errand

- If your comrade has children, babysit for an afternoon

You can always ask for other ways to be of assistance! Each bleeder is different, and might appreciate support in different ways.

Thoughts from Bleeders

“Periods can be variable from person to person, from time to time. Sometimes I have such a bad time that I need to be treated like a toddler with a cold: this could look like nourishing soups, warm drinks, affection, especially cuddles, and patience. Obviously, being on your period doesn't mean you get a get-out-of-jail card for shitty behaviour or irresponsibility, but realizing that you'll be emotionally sensitive and easier to overwhelm early in the stage helps. If you have a clean house, meals prepped, as well as loving and understanding house mates this stage of your cycle is much improved.”

-menstruator, 27

“It’s usually best not to ask someone if they are on their period; let them bring it up. My main period survival item is Advil/ibuprofen. Sometimes I don’t have it and when someone else does, it is much

appreciated. I also crave being physically held while bleeding."

-menstruator, 25

"I have reached postmenopause and I do not miss menstruation one bit. My whole 40 years of menstruating, I experienced debilitating cramps, intense PMS, and bleeding so profusely that I often had to use two super plus tampons at once. I had zero medical help and was expected to work normally, never mentioning what was going on. I advocate for uterus-havers to get elective hysterectomies (medical professionals do not offer this). No longer menstruating is a huge bonus of aging. For me, it was truly a curse.

-menstruator, 63

"I got my period at 13, before my older sister got hers. My mom smiled, and said proudly, 'you're a woman now.' She told all *her friends, which was humiliating. Beginning to menstruate was a horror; not only was the physical sensation of bleeding awful, but I was at the mercy of my body. I couldn't stop the bleeding any more than I could stop the effects of an estrogen-driven puberty.*

Several months after beginning testosterone HRT, my menstruation ceased. During a testosterone shortage, my period briefly returned, and I was suicidal. I had never realized how gravely menstruation was affecting my mental state.

-former menstruator, 22

Fun Facts

Egg release does not alternate every month between the two ovaries and appears to be random. If one ovary is removed, the remaining ovary releases an egg every month.

Did you know that birth due-dates are calculated based on the beginning of the last noted menstrual period?

Sources

A dozen bleeders
One post-hysterectomy, post-menopause mother
One former bleeder currently on testosterone
One current bleeder formerly on testosterone
Other sources include

- https://www.merckmanuals.com/home/women-s-health-issues/biology-of-the-female-reproductive-system/menstrual-cycle?redirectid=623?ruleredirectid=30
- https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK542229/

Additional reading

The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles by Emily Martin, 1991

Stay tuned for Volume 2!